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## Chapter 3, Breton Nationalism and Modern France: The Permanent Revolution

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# BRETON NATIONALISM AND MODERN FRANCE:

## THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION

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### INTRODUCTION

In the Paris street riots of May, 1968, Breton students fought under the flag of Brittany; the same year at the annual folk festival held in Quimper members of a Breton folk-dance group, workers from Brest, circulated petitions to the central government calling for a restoration of ancient Breton liberties, including the use of the language in schools. These were not isolated incidents but part of a vigorous nationalist movement that has existed since the nineteenth century, and which in its extreme phase demands full independence from France and statehood for a population of over three million.

This paper is concerned with the dynamics of modern Breton nationalism; its origin and development from the formal inauguration of the movement in the late nineteenth century to the present day. Working solely with documentary sources<sup>1</sup> and following the approach of Thrupp (1970) and Wolf (1969) I have utilized the case history method to cover the background and circumstances out of which the movement grew, the nature of its ideology and leadership, and its developmental career. Three stages will be followed. The first step will be to investigate the impact of techno-economic change on the genesis of nationalism.

The second step will be to examine characteristic forms of nationalist ideology, leadership and organization. The third step will be to trace the development of specific organizations in relationship to other forms of institutional change.

## TECHNO-ECONOMIC CHANGE ON THE REGIONAL LEVEL

### The Ecosystem Prior to Change

As a geographic region Brittany's dominant characteristic is its physical isolation from the rest of France. This factor explains in part both the failure of national integration and the resulting persistence and maintenance of strong regional cultural traditions until the turn of the present century. Looking like a great thumb projecting into the Atlantic Ocean from the fist of France, Brittany's seaward orientation was a characteristic feature from the time of early settlement. Only a short sailing distance from Britain, it became the refuge of Brythonic Celts fleeing from the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the sixth century A.D. Successive immigrating Celtic populations settled themselves along a ragged coastline indented with natural harbors, developing an economy based on fishing and agriculture. The interior, an undulating plateau of forest and moorland, here and there broken by rocky headlands and cut by swift rivers, remained remote and inaccessible. For centuries cultivation remained fixed within a zone seldom more than six kilometers from the coastline.

Until the late nineteenth century, when the Second Agricultural Revolution brought profound changes in technology, the Breton peasant economy was stabilized on the basis of small-scale grain farming,

primitive tools and hand labor, an ecotype Wolf refers to as paleotechnic (1966:19). Soil deficiencies and the scarcity of arable land acted as further checks on agricultural productivity and such surpluses as could be produced were sufficient only to maintain a small-scale feudal order in which the landowner-nobility were scarcely better off than the tenant-peasant. Under such conditions a system of share-tenancy (métayage), became the dominant form of tenure. The latter half of the nineteenth century found Brittany a rural backwater, remote in space and time from the economic changes that had begun fifty years earlier to transform the rest of France. There were few other regions in the nation that had retained so much the earmarks of the ancien régime.

Peasant communities were small and isolated from each other. Socio-economic relationships were still based on a de facto feudal order; share-tenancy and cash-tenancy were the dominant forms of peasant tenure. Population growth had been slow but had long since outstripped available land, and the peasant custom of partible inheritance had brought about excessive fragmentation of land holdings. Pressure on the land had only one escape-valve: emigration. The drift to towns and cities increased sharply in the last half of the nineteenth century: where 8,000 Bretons had left the region in the period 1831-1851, 116,000 departed between 1851-1872 (Delumeau 1969:466). Emigration thus balancing population increase, a low tolerable man-land ration was maintained. While barely provided with a living, the peasant was nevertheless subject to few of the privations suffered by his brethren in other parts of Europe at that time.



The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a radical transformation in the Breton economy and regional culture brought about primarily as a result of the Second Agricultural Revolution. The results of these changes were to have a precipitating effect on the rise of nationalistic organizations and the shaping of a nationalistic ideology.

#### The Causes of Change

The Second Agricultural Revolution emerging along with the Industrial Revolution drew from a common pool of scientific experimentation and knowledge. Major innovations in the field of agriculture included techniques of crop rotation, the use of chemical fertilizers, new crop types, and improved farm machinery. Although these innovations had been slowly transforming agriculture in other regions of France as far back as the late eighteenth century, they were slow to reach Brittany. The factors of physical isolation and cultural conservatism certainly operated as major barriers; it was not until about 1880 that the transformation began, primarily through the medium of newly established farmers' syndicates.

The agrarian syndicalist movement which did so much to break down peasant conservatism was sponsored not by peasants but by innovators from the landed aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Inspired by the Social Catholic ideology of the times, explicit in such writings as those of the sociologist Frédéric Le Play, the sponsors of agrarian reform saw in the formation of syndicates a method of reaching the ears and mind of the peasant, and a means of effecting socio-economic change in rural

society. Encouraged by a bill passed by Parliament in 1884 legalizing such groups, large landowners in Brittany began setting up local syndicates, later to be united in a powerful regional structure, and federated in 1886 as the Union Centrale des Syndicats des Agriculteurs de France (UCSAF). Although agricultural syndicates were open to all strata of rural society, from large landlords to share-tenants and farm laborers, leadership and control remained in the hands of a paternalistic landed aristocracy.<sup>2</sup>

The agrarian syndicalist movement was given further impetus by counter-moves to establish rival organizations. Republican leaders, again, not peasants but town dwellers with a sense of mission, set up their own versions of syndicates. Called cooperatives (or mutuelles), the emphasis was economic rather than social or moral, and among other things provided farm credit and insurance.

A radical phase of the syndicalist movement emerged in the last years of the nineteenth century. Dissatisfied with the conservative doctrines of the Social Catholics, militant priests organized a splinter group known as the Christian Democrats. In Brittany, the new faction was led by Félix Trochur, a young Breton priest who preached activism and emancipation, and was instrumental in establishing a network of syndicates along with insurance and credit societies.

Despite the divergences in motivation and viewpoint, the factions within the agrarian syndicalist movement were united in a common goal: to increase the productivity of the peasant and, by marketing surplus commodities, to make small-scale farming a profitable enterprise. In

the last two decades of the nineteenth century the desired changes were effected in most of rural Brittany. The use of new equipment, new cultivation methods, and chemical fertilizers made possible both an extension and intensification of cultivation. An innovation in plow design spurred a trend toward massive land clearing, opening up the interior moorland, once used only for sheep pasturage. The introduction of new forage crops now permitted the raising of horses, cows and pigs. Rye, the traditional grain staple, was replaced by wheat and new types of vegetables that found a ready local market.

Although mixed farming tended to remain the basis of Breton agriculture, a shift to market gardening occurred in areas along the coast where milder microclimates favored early vegetables. The building of a railway line in 1880 linking coastal Brittany to Paris further accelerated the trend toward cash-cropping and in a number of areas canneries were established to handle surplus commodities. By the turn of the century agriculture had been transformed into an economic enterprise that aimed at maximum production and maximal profits in a competitive market system on both a regional and national level. Whether the peasant sold milk and butter or surplus wheat locally, or produced peas and artichokes for sale in Paris, his involvement in the world of the marketplace entailed a major shift to a new way of life in which the self-subsistent quasi-feudal isolation of the past was replaced by an emergent awareness of his integration within a regional and national politico-economic system.

The railway line that opened up Brittany to national and world markets spurred the development of another sector of the regional

economy, the fishing industry. Prior to the construction of the railway line in 1880 fishing was scaled to the needs of the local market. With the development of fast transportation fish hauls could be shipped to meet the demands of the Paris market. Fishing rapidly became commercialized; fleets increased in size becoming highly specialized, particularly in deep-sea fishing for cod and tuna, and off-shore fishing for sardines. In turn the development of ship-building and the construction of local canneries changed fishing villages into small-scale commercial ports.

#### The Ramifications of Techno-Economic Change

Thus at the turn of the century major techno-economic changes in rural and maritime Brittany had brought to an isolated, self-sufficient, but poverty-ridden population the bright promise of "modernization" with its attendant benefits. But the results of these changes within the next two decades of the twentieth century were largely negative. Demographic expansion checked the gains from increased agricultural productivity, and entry into a competitive world market rendered the Breton fishing economy highly vulnerable to price fluctuations. The eventual decline in the economy coupled with a growing realization of Brittany's peripheral position with regard to the center of economic and political control in Paris, created a favorable breeding-ground for incipient nationalism. Let us examine these factors in some detail.

Increased productivity, one of the prime effects of neo-technic agriculture, served not only to tie the peasant to the local market, but substantially enlarged his food supply and improved his diet. The result was an expansion in family size creating a significant surge in population growth out of proportion to available arable land. The drift from rural

areas to local towns and cities was accelerated, but because urban areas were limited in size and number with small-scale industries that could only absorb limited labor, the result was simply to increase the number of unemployed. The alternative was massive migration from the region: between 1891-1911 the exodus increased to 206,000 compared with 126,000 from 1872-1891 (Delumeau 1969:466). The inability of the Breton economy to keep pace with population was becoming increasingly evident.

The decline of the highly specialized fishing industry further added to a sense of crisis. In the fast expanding competitive market of commercial fishing, Brittany soon fell behind. The important sardine industry was first struck. An oversupply in conjunction with heavy competition from foreign trawler fleets brought a collapse in prices. Conflict was generated internally: fishermen disputed with canneries over prices, factory workers were at odds with bosses, and fisherman undercut fisherman (Delumeau 1969:473-5). About the same time deep-sea fishing was declining for the same reasons. Competition from foreign mechanized fleets and the invasion of European markets by cheaper products each year reduced the number of ships leaving Breton ports. By the beginning of World War I fleets had dwindled, ports were at a standstill, and unemployment was widespread. The War itself effectively brought to an end what had been for over three decades Brittany's major economic enterprise.

## THE EMERGENCE OF BRETON NATIONALISM

### Incipient Nationalism at the Turn of the Century

Against this background of increasing economic and social dislocation in the pre-World War I period, there crystallized a growing sense of estrangement from the centralized bureaucracy in Paris whose inaction in the face of the crisis was interpreted as disinterest in Brittany's special problems. The movement of protest against economic competitors took on a nationalist coloring with the establishment of the Union Régionaliste Bretonne (URB) in 1898. Moderate in its ideology, the URB phrased its economic demands in terms of a regional nationalism that had been latent ever since the French Revolution had revoked Brittany's political autonomy.

Through the nineteenth century a small but dedicated intellectual elitist group had kept alive a consciousness of a distinctive Breton heritage and history: the Celtic language and cultural ties; the centuries of independence which ended in 1532 when, as a result of a royal marriage the Duchy of Brittany became a part of France; the concession of regional autonomy, with a separate and sovereign assembly until 1789 when these rights were annulled by the Jacobins; the suppression of Breton language and culture; the revolt of General Cadoudal who led the Breton armies against Napoleon in 1804 and was subsequently defeated and beheaded.

Elitist groups, predominantly drawn from the monarchist upper class, attempted to maintain a concerted front through the Association Bretonne, founded in 1801, whose principal aim was the restoration of pre-Jacobin political liberties. The association was soon suppressed by the government, but formed again in 1843, only to be banned in 1863.

Attempts to preserve the Breton language and distinctive cultural traditions were also part of the latent nationalism of the nineteenth century. Poets and writers were active in the creation of a vernacular literature in the romantic tradition. In 1870 a petition to permit the teaching of Breton in schools was addressed to the government, but was turned down.

Among the peasantry there was also a late nineteenth century revival of interest in the traditional culture, coincident with other changes triggered by the Second Agricultural Revolution. Increased income was channeled into conspicuous consumption. Highly decorative and costly costumes of a distinct Breton style appeared, along with carved, ornate furniture and indigenous architectural styles. Traditional dances and music were revived in keeping with the elaboration of festivals and ceremonies in both social and religious life.

From the various themes of this incipient nationalism--more a collective sentiment than a movement--the URB created an ideology that wove together the myth of a past cultural order with its sense of ethnic distinction, and a program of economic and political reform. It called for the teaching of Breton in the school system, a recognition of former Breton rights by an increase in regional representation at the parliamentary level, greater attention to the development of untapped economic resources, and the alleviation of the economic crisis in ports and towns. Although ineffective against the intransigent central government, the URB was instrumental in establishing a model for future nationalist associations. From this point on, the goal of establishing a new economic order was inseparable from the recreation of the past-- the golden age of political freedom and cultural and linguistic autonomy.

## The Proliferation of Nationalist Organizations Prior to World War I

In the period of economic crisis prior to the First World War the nationalist movement expanded rapidly with a proliferation of associations and the appearance of a number of periodicals attempting to foster a distinctive "Breton consciousness." A Catholic association founded in 1905 by a liberal priest, Abbé Perrot, was dedicated to the revival of the language and traditional culture, symbolically taking for its name the Breton term Bleun-Brug (Heath Flower). Although professing not to be concerned with political goals, Abbé Perrot took a firm regionalist position with respect to a restoration of former rights as the only means of pressuring for economic and social reform. Bleun-Brug was particularly effective in supporting and accelerating the revival of traditional Breton music, songs, dances and costumes, organizing regional festivals, and sponsoring language classes for young people. At the same time, the intellectual elite at the forefront of the movement were attempting to reach all segments of the public through periodicals, newspapers and reviews. Over a dozen periodicals, some exclusively in Breton, appeared during the pre-war era, a few polemical in nature but all dedicated to reviving a sense of ethnicity along with the need for coupling economic reform with political and cultural freedom. To all nationalists, the Breton language became the symbol of the new ideology. Petitions to permit the teaching of the language were sent yearly to Paris between 1905-1911, but were greeted by silence.

The movement entered a separatist phase in 1911 with the establishment of the first Breton nationalist party (Strollad Broadel Breiz).



Two aspects differentiated the organization from the URB. The new party was led by a small group of young liberal writers and journalists who espoused political activism in contrast to the URB's conservative and pacifist program. Furthermore, the basic tenet of the party platform was the complete severance of ties with France and the creation of a sovereign nation. It was a stride beyond the URB's cautious plea for a restoration of regional rights. To further circulate this demand an official party organ, Breiz Dishual (Free Brittany), was founded; its rallying cry was "Brittany for the Bretons." Within its pages appeared one of the strongest denunciations of the French government yet heard. Speaking of French "oppression" since the treaty of 1532, it cited the gradual attrition of liberties, the loss of language, customs, civil and religious traditions that constituted the former national patrimony; it spoke of the refusal to assimilate to French culture in terms of the ability of "the Breton soul" to survive and resist all efforts to crush and annihilate it. Likening Brittany to enslaved Ireland and Poland, the party called for independence and nationhood, with the use of its own flag, its own language and national hymns (Barbin 1937:114-115).

Although the militancy of the nationalist party was eclipsed a few years later by the outbreak of the war, the pattern of political action in the name of nationalism was set as a model to be resurrected in a new guise at a later date.

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL CAREER OF NATIONALIST ORGANIZATIONS

### The Resurgence of Nationalism and the Rise of Factionalism

While the disruption of four years of war brought an end to specific organizations and the diverse publications supporting Breton nationalist goals, some evidence of the movement's viability was revealed at the Peace Conference in 1919. Phrasing the aspirations of Breton separatists in terms of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination, a petition was presented to President Wilson and the conference members calling for national sovereignty in the name of Brittany's former independence. The petition was signed by 800 notables: deputies, senators, general councilors and the five Breton bishops.

The following years saw the inauguration of a series of new periodicals and reviews dedicated to a revival of the nationalist movement. One journal, Breiz Atao, (Brittany Forever) is considered the most influential (Barbin 1937:127ff). Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, it embodied the resurrection of the polemic, the spirit and fervor of the pre-war publications. In French and Breton it addressed itself specifically to the leading economic problems of the post-war decade, linking the only hope for economic development with political independence from France. Pointing to the recently gained freedom of the Czechs, Bulgars and Poles, it stated that "the incapacity of the French state machine, the inactivity of the French people faced with the profound crisis of our epoch, force us to look to ourselves to find a solution for our economic problems" quoted in Bolitho 1924:248). Chief among the issues pinpointed by Breiz Atao were the increased exodus from the farms, the neglected ports and urban unemployment. Calling attention to the disparity between taxes paid out and government spending for the region, economic salvation was

viewed in terms of autonomy: utilization of regional revenues for self-development; the creation of industry; rehabilitation of the ports; and revitalization of a farming economy undermined by unfavorable market conditions.

Through the twenties Breiz Atao remained the principal voice of the nationalist movement. Although at first a quarto review, it was later to become the official organ of a formal party organization. Supporters of the movement held annual congresses to discuss policy and its implementation; at the Congress held in 1927 the decision to form a nationalist party was announced.<sup>3</sup> Le Parti Autonomiste Breton (PAB) was officially founded a few months later.

Internal dissension soon arose over the issue of separatism and nationhood versus federalism. The concept of a European federation was gaining adherents among other national minority groups. Some Breton nationalists saw distinct advantages to be gained not only in the structure of federation but in allying the new party with similar political organizations representing minority groups in other areas of Europe. Eventually those favoring federalism over separation emerged in control of the new party, with Breiz Atao the official party journal. Factionalism continued, however, and combined with financial difficulties effectively undermined party organization. In 1931 the separatists regained leadership of the movement reforming in the name of a new party, the Parti National Breton (PNB).

Although its goals were designed to be realized through legitimate political channels, neither the PAB nor the PNB fained enough popular support to carry through a successful electoral campaign. Schism within

the ranks of the nationalist leaders, even after the emergence of the PNB, continued to weaken the effectiveness of the nationalist movement as a totality.

The need to awaken the public of Brittany, and France as well, to the urgency of the Breton problem set the course of the PNB through the Great Depression of the thirties. The party launched a vigorous propaganda campaign through Breiz Atao, combined with non-violent demonstrations at government-sponsored ceremonies and on occasions of visits by French government officials.

Coincident with the emergence of PNB's program of a "politics of force" was the opening phase of a new "politics of violence." Modeled after the Irish Sinn Fein, a secret association formed calling itself Gwenn Ha Du (White and Black) after the colors of the Breton flag. Echoing the PNB's program of achieving economic, cultural and linguistic reforms through independence, it began a series of violent demonstrations against the central government. One of the initial acts, in 1932, was the blowing up of a statue in Rennes commemorating the union of Brittany with France at the very moment the French Premier was attending the celebration of the 400th anniversary of that union in another Breton city. During the next few years there were numerous acts of terrorism such as the bombing of administrative buildings in various towns and cities of the region. Less militant separatists, although overtly disavowing the Gwenn Ha Du, realized its value. One writer, while admitting it was a terrorist organization, claimed it had nevertheless struck a forceful blow for the cause and had served to whip up the energies of the otherwise apathetic Breton (Barbin 1937:141-145).

The demonstrations also had the effect of reinforcing the French government's negative attitude toward the Breton nationalist movement and its demands, at the same time alerting Paris to the need for a confrontation with the activists.

While the separatists remained divided over the degree of extremism necessary to achieve their goals, there was implicit agreement that political action had to be taken outside of legitimate channels. Opposed to this new point were the regionalists whose pacifism, conservatism and belief in moderate legitimate courses of action branded them as the reactionaries of the movement. Some of these associations were among the pioneers of the movement; the Catholic Breun-Blug, the URB, Association Bretonne; others like the Gorsedd of Bards although supporting Breton claims had been essentially apolitical.<sup>4</sup> In 1936 these associations combined in a Front Breton to formulate a program for political, economic and cultural reforms under a regional scheme. Forty-one candidates at the general elections agreed to accept the program and fifteen were elected.

While the regionalist view achieved some temporary political representation these successes were not followed by any action on the part of the government to meet even moderate demands. In response, the separatists accelerated their anti-government propaganda and demonstrations. Finally, in 1939 the government officially dissolved the PNB and banned its newspaper. Two of its leaders who had escaped to Germany were condemned to death in absentia; others were imprisoned.

The exiled leaders in Germany appealed to that government to support their demand for independence, and apparently were assured by high

officials that a Breton state would be set up at the end of the war (Ellis 1968:188).

After the invasion of France and its subsequent defeat in 1940, Breton nationalists looked to the German conquerors for support. The separatist faction reemerged--from exile and prison--and a new organization Conseil National Breton was formed to implement the program leading to eventual autonomy. The Parti National Breton was resurrected and the official party newspaper given a symbolic title L'heure bretonne. But their demands for complete autonomy and their violent anti-Vichy stand brought about several adverse reactions. The Vichy government pressured the German administration to take active measures against the Breton nationalists. Although no repressive action was taken, German support of extremist nationalist goals weakened and a shift was made instead to the more moderate demands of the regionalists. Accordingly, in 1941, the Breton language and history were admitted as subjects within the schools, radio broadcasts in Breton were authorized, and a Celtic institute was set up to coordinate the cultural societies dedicated to research on the Breton intellectual and artistic heritage. The regionalists were also instrumental in setting up a Comité Consultatif de Bretagne which was modeled after the pre-revolutionary Parlement de Bretagne, but failed to obtain an official status.

The concessions granted to the regionalists, while minimal, served to antagonize the French and widen the breach between the Bretons and French, eventually leading to open conflict. The Vichy government regarded the new-found gains as evidence of an anti-French secessionist plot. Some members of the maquis, the French resistance movement, apparently

linking nationalist gains with pro-German collaborators, began, in 1943, a campaign of assassination against Bretons who belonged to any nationalist group, whether political or cultural in emphasis.

The climax of the anti-Breton campaign came with the murder of the founder of Bleun-Brug, Abbé Perrot, the pioneer and symbol of the nationalist movement. The effect was to shift many "neutral" Bretons into open opposition to the French Resistance. A radical splinter group from the PNB organized a military unit, the Formation Jean-Marie Perrot, to oppose the maquis, and aligning themselves with the Germans accepted German arms and uniforms. For the remainder of the war the internecine conflict continued, a symbolic demonstration of the widening gap that separated Breton goals and French determination to oppose them.

The French view that the Perrot unit typified Breton pro-German and anti-French activities led directly, in the post war period, to the severe suppression of all aspects of nationalism. After the Liberation the concessions allowed by the Germans were withdrawn and the language banned; arrest warrants were issued for anyone connected with any Breton society or association, irrespective of political orientation. Sentences of banishment, confiscation of property and loss of civil rights were passed. A number of Bretons were imprisoned; some leaders escaped to Ireland, fifteen were executed in 1946.

The result of this punitive action was to strengthen the base of the movement rather than weaken it. From this base a fresh growth of nationalist associations soon emerged expressing at first cultural rather than political or economic goals. Brittany's failure to recover from the

post-war economic slump soon directed attention to the need for action, and economic demands came once more to the fore of nationalist programs.

#### The Post-War Economic Crisis

The decade following the Liberation was marked by general economic stagnation in both rural and urban sectors of Brittany. A war-time shift from commercial cash-cropping to a base of mixed farming and self-subsistence had now to be reversed. But past experience with unstable prices tended to produce a conservative reaction--diversified farming once revived was sustained as a hedge against market fluctuations and rising food prices, even at the risk of income loss and a lowered standard of living (Morin 1970:52). The exodus from farm to towns and cities began again. Urban areas, however, had suffered widespread, and in some cases, total destruction during the invasion, and reconstruction was lagging. An already atrophied industrial sector was unable to provide necessary employment for the growing population. In 1947-50 major strikes and demonstrations broke out among shipyard workers in two of Brittany's major ports, St. Nazaire and Brest.

Beginning in 1948, while other areas of France entered a period of growth and expansion, regions such as Brittany, particularly the more isolated western area (Finistère) continued in a state of stagnation and decline. Between 1954 and 1962 the number of farmers fell by 25 percent, and that of fishermen by 20 percent. The scarcity of jobs caused by population surplus and social mobility intensified migration: 2,500 young people were leaving Sud-Finistère annually. The signs of demographic imbalance were evident after 1950, and the declining ratio of young people in the total population compared unfavorably with the national average (Morin 1970:49ff).



Those who remained---a new generation of farmers---were instrumental in breaking away from the pattern of mixed farming. The period from 1950 to the late '60s saw a transformation paralleling the Second Agricultural Revolution of the late nineteenth century, a shift to commercial specialized crops, but with improved technology. Just as the new plow marked a major innovation in the past, the tractor now became the craze. Rapid mechanization was stimulated both by the government's stress on expansion and productivity and the availability of credit from farm syndicates. But, as Wright points out, mechanization was not always the solution to the peasant problem and often had uneconomic consequences: one was a heavy burden of peasant indebtedness and another was the unprofitable attempt to mechanize too small a farm (Wright 1964:145).

And, too, the modernization of agriculture was more than a matter of change in technology. On the distribution side, the marketing system had changed little in fifty years. An archaic transportation system, the long distance to the Paris market in combination with competitive pricing from more favored regions often created a situation of feast or famine. The government's slowness to take more than minimal action to regulate the anarchy of market pricing finally produced a violent reaction from Breton commercial farmers.<sup>5</sup>

Beginning with the "artichoke revolution" of 1960 and continuing into 1961, farmers began a series of mass demonstrations in market garden areas climaxing in the jacquerie of June, 1961.<sup>6</sup> At that point some 4,000 farmers on tractors, protesting a sharp drop in commodity prices, jammed the highway leading to the market town of Morlaix. The leaders were young syndicalists whose later arrest triggered almost two weeks of rural insurrection.

### The Response: the Renaissance of the Nationalist Movement

The worsening economic crisis again brought to the forefront the latent forces of the nationalist movement. Fragmented groups, their organizations officially dissolved in the post-war reprisals, began to draw together after 1950 under the unofficial designation of Comité d'Etudes et de Liaison des Intérêts Breton (CELIB).<sup>7</sup> Its principal goal was to facilitate regional economic development and expansion through merging various economic, occupational and cultural groups in a united front, a regional pressure group which would draw up and present programs of economic reform to the government. Although its aims were primarily economic, the structure of CELIB included a cultural commission concerned with winning official recognition.

Avowedly apolitical, it was nevertheless a reformation of pre-war conservative regionalist groups, and as such was opposed by the more politically active separatists, who viewed the solution of economic problems as possible only within the context of political action and cultural autonomy. A schism also developed within the CELIB between those who wished to remain politically neutral and those who favored seeking left-wing support.

Despite its official recognition as an advisory group by the government in 1961, some eight years later it had still been unable to achieve any of its goals in Parliament. As the failure of the CELIB became evident the initial reservation of anti-regionalist critics seemed justified. Counter-moves to create alternative programs brought a proliferation of nationalist associations, which while sharing common goals, differed in emphasis and means of achievement. Two types emerged,

in most cases reflecting continuity with patterns or in some cases actual organizations established in the pre-war period: those with a strong politico-economic bias and the cultural organizations that stressed language reform and the revival of Breton dance, music and the arts. Those inclined to political action included, in the order of their founding: Le Mouvement pour l'Organisation de la Bretagne (MOB), Union Democratique Bretonne (UDB), Front pour la Liberation de Bretagne (FLB), Sav Breizh.

An early opponent of the CELIB policy of qualified regionalism, the MOB was founded in 1957 in the tradition of the pre-war federalists. Its program outlined the evolution of Brittany toward internal federalism within the French state. But because of de Gaulle's intransigence it later shifted its line in favor of independence from France and incorporation within a European federal state (Ellis 1968: 192). Led by a militant intellectual, Yann Fouéré, a platform of political, economic and cultural demands was announced with the familiar emotional overtones of pre-war appeals: "The spirit of the Breton political movement is decapitated--we must give it a head, a spirit, a goal, a flame, a hope, a will." The appeal to young militants was a strong one, and it is chiefly this group that has responded. Caerléon, historian of the nationalist movement, states that the MOB became categorized in time as extremist and has failed to capture wide-spread popular support (1969:50ff).

To represent the more conservative element, the UDB was formed in 1963, calling for a special regional assembly with effective autonomy in economic and cultural affairs. Though regionalist in aims,

it distinguished itself from CELIB by its emphasis on direct political action through the polls.

The FLB was the extremist reaction to the failure of legitimate channels of protest. Modeling itself on the pre-war terrorist Gwenn Ha Du, it began in 1966 to conduct a campaign of violence and for the next two years set off explosions in police stations and prefectures and other administrative buildings symbolic of centralized authority. Since 1969, after a number of arrests, the FLB has suspended its activities. The ideology of the FLB reflected sophisticated awareness of the ideological currents of the time. With reference to Algeria, key slogans compared the "colonial status" of Brittany and spoke of the need to "decolonize" the region (Caerléon 1969:141). As in the case of the Gwenn Ha Du, the FLB and its activities were officially disclaimed by other nationalist groups but a statement by the politician and writer René Pleven makes a telling point: "The public powers can stop attempts of the agitators most efficiently by announcing a plan of sweeping action. Obvious economic difficulties of the region aid the agitators to find cooperation in the population" (quoted in Caerléon 1969:171).

The most recent group to form, the Sav Breizh, is a youth movement generated by the events of the nation-wide so-called "cultural revolution" of May-June, 1968. During the fighting in the Paris streets, young Bretons carried their Black and White flag along with representatives of other French minority groups, the Occitans (of Languedoc) and Corsicans, among others. The Breton program, socialist in leaning, consisted of a blend of tradition and innovation; they demanded self-government for the Bretons with the aim of alleviating underdevelopment, protecting the traditional

culture and restoring the language. Their points included opposition to the common market, a moratorium on farmers' and workers' debts, agricultural cooperatives, and an affirmation of solidarity with all other oppressed minority groups, including the Blacks in North America and the Indians in South America (Caerléon 1969:204ff).

The post-war revival of the cultural movement is marked by an emphasis on youth organizations as the new vehicles to carry Breton nationalist ideals. In addition to the reestablishment in 1948 of Bleun-Brug, which, as in the past addressed its program of cultural revival to Catholic youth<sup>8</sup>, a number of local folklorique societies were founded, the Cercles Celtiques. These were concerned with traditional Breton history, folklore, dance and music. In 1950 a grand confederation of these and similar organizations was founded under the name of Kendalc'h. At first Kendalc'h along with other cultural societies, was apolitical, although implicitly backing nationalist political and economic goals. However, an eventual decision was made to make an open avowal of political support. Along with the Association de Sonneurs (association of Breton musicians) the decision was made to abandon a policy limited to cultural revival and "engage in combat for Brittany with all our force" (Caerléon 1969:224).

Today the nationalist movement is decentralized and acephalous. Factionalism exists, based primarily on the question of what strategies to employ and what goals have priority. Yet according to a leader of the MOB, there is a consensus among the various sectors of the movement--economic, political and cultural--as to the goals themselves, strongly reinforced by a sense of unity based on a distinctive ethnic

and linguistic tradition and a well-defined territory (Mainwaring 1969). In opposition to what is viewed as the common enemy, the government of France, Breton nationalists have sought support from, and in turn have supported, other French minority groups: Alsatians, Basques, and the Occitans of Languedoc (Caerléon 1969:62). Pan-Celtic links are firmly forged, and both cultural and political ties are maintained, particularly with Wales whose own separatists openly back the Breton quest for independence.

In 1969 separatist leaders in Brittany entertained a growing expectation that the government would make some real concessions to Breton demands. Alan Al Louarn, representing the MOB, in an interview speaks of preparing for a Breton state; of a shadow cabinet which covers all administrative structures and is ready to take over responsibility for the Breton community when the moment arrives (Mainwaring 1969:230). Until that moment, as Caerléon has put it, Brittany is a country in "a permanent state of revolution" (Caerléon 1969).

#### CONCLUSIONS

I have attempted to outline in this case history the various phases in the development of the Breton nationalist movement with the aim of generating hypotheses or tentative generalizations useful for a comparative study of nationalism among other minority groups. The first step was to establish the basic causes which catalyzed the movement and kept it viable. The second was to examine the characteristic forms of ideology and organizational patterns of the various sectors of the movement. The third was to trace the development and internal changes in the movement through the present day.

With respect to causality, a fundamental distinction must be made between two types of nationalism; between that which existed within the major span of the nineteenth century, and that altered form which arose around the turn of the century. The distinction corresponds to what has been called "antiquarian" nationalism versus "modern" nationalism (Symmons-Symonolewicz 1970). The former, appearing in the early nineteenth century, was a response to the loss of Breton political and cultural liberties at the time of the formation of the Jacobian state. In nature it was a passive reaction restricted in social scope to the aristocracy whose power had been stripped and whose social order was threatened by republicanism, and to the literati who sought in the romantic tradition to revive and preserve a mythic past.

Modern Breton nationalism appears to have emerged as a response to the dislocations caused by rapid economic and social change. Brittany's late entry into the world market system forced a rapid development in the rural and maritime economy. An improved transport system linked a peripheral region with metropolitan markets, and commercialization and specialization in agriculture and fishing followed. Exposure to the anarchy of the market soon affected farmer and fisherman alike. Contracting markets combined with an expanding population brought on an economic crisis that continued until the beginning of World War I.

As Wolf (1969:282) has noted, "paradoxically, the very spread of the capitalist market principle also forced men to seek defenses against it. They could meet this end either by cleaving to their traditional institutions, increasingly subverted by the forces which they were trying to neutralize; or they could commit themselves to the

search for new social forms which would grant them shelter" Breton nationalist organizations erected their defenses by attempting both-- to search for new forms, but in the name of the traditional past. Ideological platforms varied in the stress placed on the past or future.

Based on these criteria of ideology, two types of nationalist organizations emerged: a "cultural" type seeking reform in terms of the past, and a "political" type primarily future-oriented. Cultural organizations like the Catholic Bleun-Brug viewed social and economic reform in terms of a return to a former golden age--and the revival of the status quo with its fixed social order of nobility, clergy and peasant. Accordingly, ethnic and linguistic insularity were strongly emphasized. Leadership was passive, conservative and to the right of regional and national politics. Political organizations stressed economic reform in terms of increased development of regional resources--essentially a program of modernization but to be achieved through a return to the political autonomy of the past. The insistence on language revival provides the unifying symbol of continuity linking past and future.

The dynamics of development and change in nationalist organizations shows certain parallels with the process of revitalization as analyzed by Wallace (1970:191ff). With some modifications because of the secular nature of nationalism, Wallace's stages can be used as a model for understanding the phenomenon of Breton nationalism.

Stage 1: "formulation of a code." This stage is characterized by a reaction to cultural distortion in which the existing culture is contrasted with the goal culture (past or future). A program of demands is set forth and a small group of leaders form the nucleus



of an organization. The program may take on the attributes of an incipient association or political party, but a formal organization or administrative structure is merely blue-printed.

Stage 2: "communication." Breton nationalist associations are involved in two kinds of communication: petition and appeal to the central government, and the dissemination of the code in order to attract local support. Frequently, messages are aimed at special interest groups such as workers, peasants, youth, and Catholics. The media most frequently used are periodicals.

Stage 3: "organization." The gradual expansion in the number of followers and the development of a formal administrative structure probably takes place at this stage. The holding of annual party congresses implies both followers and a formal structure. A number of parallel organizations may be present differing in code and appeal to various groups and components, the basic distinction being between organizations that stress political goals and those that emphasize cultural revitalization.

Stage 4: "adaptation." At this stage there occur reformulations in code and strategy shifts in leadership. In any given organization factionalism develops over code strategy and leadership issues which may result in open breaks and even lead to the dissolution of the organization or its fission into a number of different bodies. In the Breton case, this stage is reached when economic stress is heightened and demands and petitions are consistently rejected by the central government. Alternative methods and goals must be formulated. It is under these circumstances

that terrorist splinter groups emerge offering drastic solutions to the impasse. If demands are met, even in part, some form of cultural transformation (Stage 5) may take place.

Stage 5: "cultural transformation." In the case of the nationalism of minority groups, this stage typically involves government reaction in the form of severe repressive measures which can lead to a temporary moratorium on nationalist activities. In Brittany this was the pattern before and after World War II. But whether a true transformation takes place, or a halt is called on overt activism, the cycle is ended until economic and social dislocations create the appropriate conditions under which old codes are rephrased, and new ideologies emerge. It is with reference to this continuity and the reshaping of familiar patterns within a repetitive cycle, that the term "permanent revolution" is so pertinent.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The case history presented here is developed from secondary materials which are often openly partisan. This obviously raises questions of bias, but materials of this kind reveal nationalist ideas and forms of behavior which are not likely to be recorded in more "neutral" sources. One should also keep in mind, though, that nationalist literature is apt to be heavily weighted in favor of the more dramatic aspects and events of the movement, and that consequently certain lacunae may be present in the current study. Essentially, this paper is an attempt to assemble as much data on the Breton nationalism as is available in published sources in the hope that tentative generalizations or hypotheses may arise for further testing. It is my intention to follow up this initial research with a program of field study in Brittany during the summers of 1971 and 1972.

<sup>2</sup> While socio-economic reform was the major motivating force behind the syndicalist movement, there was more than a hint of less high-minded motivations. Wright (1964:18-20) suggests that large landlords with right-wing affiliations sought to enlist peasant support and thus preserve a sizeable bloc of voters against the inroads of republican ideology.

<sup>3</sup> The congress convened at Rosporden, July 1927.

<sup>4</sup> The Gorsedd of Bards, organized in 1901 as a society of Breton poets dedicated to the preservation of Celtic literary traditions, was modeled after the Gorsedd of CYMRU (Wales) (Ellis 1968:187).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of government and legislation dealing with agrarian reform see Wright (1964:162ff).

<sup>6</sup> The "artichoke revolution" was a protest against excessive wholesale prices charged by middlemen. It had the effect of demonstrating the power of organizational action. In May, 1961, farmers of south Brittany in the region of commercial potato growing protested low prices by dumping potatoes in town squares and burning ballot boxes to disrupt elections (Mallet 1962:8, 196; Caerléon 1969:74-76).

<sup>7</sup> For detailed discussion of the CELIB see Hayward (1969).

<sup>8</sup> Bleun-Brug pledged itself to fight for "the restoration of Christian Brittany with its cultural, artistic, folkloric and spiritual riches, under the banner of the Celtic cross" (Caerléon 1969:23ff). Congresses, language courses, scholastic and choral competitions were part of the total program to keep the Breton youth aware of their heritage.

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